

TEACHING THE STANDARDS

Decision Making Skills Enhance Student Health

By Sonja Evensen

How best to promote health worldwide is a question that has spurred decades of discussion. Through health education, young people learn what health is, its importance, and how to make choices that will enhance, not diminish, their person well-being. The 1948 Constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva, Switzerland, offers the most commonly accepted definition for health: “A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (www.who.int/about/definition/en).

Health literacy is defined by the Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards as “the capacity of an individual to obtain, interpret, and understand basic health information and services and the competence to use such information and services in ways which are health-enhancing.” This implies a number of levels of understanding, which include reading, listening, analytical, and decision making skills, as well as the ability to apply these skills to health situations. The Committee in 1995 arrived at a set of standards to help guide health educators in helping students attain health literacy (www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed387483.html). These core competencies have been synthesized in seven broad standards.

Standard 1. Core Concepts. Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention. Performance indicators for this standard include identifying what good health is, recognizing health problems, and understanding ways in which lifestyle, the environment, and public policies can promote health.

Standard 2. Accessing Information. Students will demonstrate the ability to access valid health information and health-promoting products and services. Performance indicators focus on identification of valid health information, products, and services including advertisements, health insurance and treatment options, and food labels.

Standard 3. Self-Management. Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and reduce health risks. Performance indicators include identifying responsible and harmful behaviors, developing health-enhancing strategies, and managing stress.

Standard 4. Analyzing Influences. Students will analyze the influence of culture, media, technology, and other factors on health. Performance indicators are related to describing and analyzing how one’s cultural background, messages from the media, technology, and one’s friends influence health.

Standard 5. Interpersonal Communication. Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal commu-

nication skills to enhance health. Performance indicators relate to interpersonal communication, refusal and negotiation skills, and conflict resolution.

Standard 6. Goal Setting and Decision Making. Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal setting and decision making skills to enhance health. Performance indicators focus on setting reasonable and attainable goals and developing positive decision making skills.

Standard 7. Advocacy. Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health. Performance indicators relate to identifying community resources, accurately communicating health information and ideas, and working cooperatively to promote health.

Through the core concepts, the standards supply just enough factual information. Using self-discovery and group-oriented activities such as discussion, role-play, and art activities, the health teacher can facilitate an experience that has meaning and relevance for the student. An activity that will help educators use the standards to make health classes come alive accompanies this article.

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DECISION TREE EXERCISE

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| 1. You’ve been invited to a party. Do you go?
(What were the factors you considered in this decision?) | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 2. You go to the party and your friends are drinking and encourage you to have something to drink. Do you join them?
(What were the factors you considered in this decision?) | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 3. Someone you like asks you to leave the party with them. Do you go?
(What were the factors you considered in this decision?) | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 4. He/she has been drinking and wants to drive. Do you get in his/her car?
(What were the factors you considered in this decision?) | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 5. He/she drives to an abandoned place and wants to have sex. Do you consent?
(What were the factors you considered in this decision?) | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 6. You agree to have sex but your partner refuses to use a condom. Do you have sex anyway?
(What were the factors you considered in this decision?) | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 7. You (or your girlfriend) get/s pregnant. Do you opt for an abortion?
(What were the factors you considered in this decision?) | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |